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ABSTRACT

This paper examines theories on discipline in education, discussing the effect of teachers' behaviors on their students. The issue can be addressed from psychological, critical, and feminist theoretical perspectives. Currently, the psychological method of handling student behavior dominates schools, with behavior modification programs in place to define behavior and recommend diagnosis and treatment for changing behavior. Critical and feminist theories question the workings of power and culture in school programs and address discipline in ways that create schools where children's emotions and feelings are considered part of their educational experience. The theories study how structures and systemic institutionalized practices reinforce systems of domination. Critical and feminist approaches examine relationships between teachers and their pupils within the school environment. They suggest that teachers are starting to understand the relationship between domination and societal violence, and they want schools to take responsibility for their role in promoting this situation. They encourage the use of democracy and respect when relating to students and suggest that administrators work harder to improve quality of instruction rather than techniques for increasing classroom control. It is suggested that boredom with course content so far removed from students' real world is one reason discipline is such a problem in schools, and teachers must enable students to utilize their minds and bodies and understand themselves and their relationships with others. (SM)

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Teachers Action--Students Lives: The Silent Voice of Discipline

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Teachers Actions--Students Lives: The Silent Voice of Discipline

> To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin (hooks, 1994, p.13).

My mother told me again and again about the miles she had to walk to attend school. She told me about the harassment and embarrassment she experienced when she was late for school. Her teacher would make her stand in front of the classroom with gum on her nose while her classmates sang demeaning songs. Her memories are painful experiences for me. I want to shut out her words but they haunt me. It only seems like yesterday when I stood in the corner of my grade two classroom staring at the blank faded yellow walls. Like my mother, my behaviour was not tolerated by my teacher. I was the *bad* child because I was talking to a friend when I should have been listening to my teacher. My punishment was a time out in the corner of the classroom. These memories still haunt me. Did my teacher, like the teacher in my mother's story, realize the power and impact her words and actions had on my life?

As a recent graduate of a Bachelor of Education Program and a student enrolled in the Masters of Education Program at the University of New Brunswick, I have learned that education is undergoing profound and rapid changes. One basic theme of the change is that there are multiply ways of understanding and no one solution can answer all our questions or offer all the necessary viewpoints about discipline. I will be starting my teaching career in the Northwest Territories in September 1998 and like all other young teachers, I am still working to develop a consistent set of principles for discipline and management.

What I do know about discipline can be theoretically understood from psychological, critical, and feminist theoretical perspectives. Most studies on discipline extend from psychological quantitative studies. Psychologists argue that individual behaviours of a child can be *fixed* and *controlled*. They focus on defining behaviour and recommending diagnosis and treatment for changing behaviour. Westmacott and Cameron (1983) note that there are times when people cannot behave appropriately. They become excited, irrational and are unable to change their behaviour on request. Psychologists suggest that, when this occurs, students should be re-moved to a quiet area where they will have time out from the experience so they will learn

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to correct their inappropriate behaviour. In my personal recollection, the psychological dominates schools. Behaviour modification programs are currently functioning within a framework of numerical degrees of achievement, cost benefits to tax payers, and the benefits of using replications of other behavioural programs.

Critical and feminist theories question the workings of power and culture in school programs and examine how to discipline in ways that create schools where children's emotions and feelings are considered part of their educational experience. They study how the structures and systemic institutionalized practices reinforce systems of domination. These theorists usually critique the traditional classroom and offer alternatives. For example, Chamberlin (1994) critiques the traditional classroom as described by Goodlad and Cuban. In this traditional portrait of the classroom, students and teachers have particular roles that respond to expected relationships with those in authority. These structures are based on power, specifically the power that enables teachers to maintain control in the classroom. This *hidden* curriculum tends to socialize students into becoming certain kinds of *good persons*.

Chamberlin argues that the ideal *good citizen* suggested by the *hidden* curriculum of the traditional classroom is a pathetic match to the democratic ideal. The citizenship produced in these power-driven classrooms is more appropriate for the citizen in autocratic societies than those in democracies.

> Because life in a classroom community is so heavily dominated by the teacher, and because students are expected to accept the teacher's decisions and authority passively and uncritically, the good citizen traits being promoted seem likely to be the opposite of those needed in democratic communities...(p.163).

Critical and feminist approaches have also examined the relationships between teachers and their pupils within the school environment. Much has been written about the various aspects of systemic violence, particularly those related to relations of class, gender, racism, heterosexism, and issues of power and control in schools. Epp and Watkinson (1997) argue violence in schools is:

> ... a subtext of traditional authoritarian structures and traditional pedagogical methods (p.25)...The use of authority in schools often assists to alienate students and encourage antagonist relationships

> between teachers and students. Children have long been trained in obedience and acceptance of authority as one of the basics of education, but learning can be subverted by the need to control students and preserve a safe learning environment (p.26)

Epp and Walkinson also argue that teachers are starting to understand and identify the relationship between domination and societal violence, and schools must take responsibility for their role in promoting this situation. They write

> Systemic violence begins with the expectation that all students of similar ages should and can learn the same things. Children are placed with large groups of similarly aged school, students and teachers are forced to adopt methods of control and routine that would be left to the military, the workforce, or the penal system. The sheer number of students contributes to teacher and administrator detachment, but dehumanization is further assured by the conviction, on the part of school personnel, that their job is to aid in the cognitive development of students and that the development of the affective is better left to the home, community, or church. The reality is that for many children these three institutions no longer exist (p.17)

Epp and Watkinson (1997) encourage the use of democracy and respect when relating to school children. From a critical pedagogical view, *teacher power* -- or authoritarian methods of dealing with students -- is detrimental to children and also to the teachers. Children accustomed to obeying solely because they dread punishment are impossible to guide through other ways. Although many teachers fear a loss of control, many who have adopted other non-authoritative methods have been able to *control* their classrooms.

> Women teachers in particular have learned to use inclusive problem-solving approaches in order to address behaviour. Be it by respect, humour, understanding, or inventiveness, they have been able to win over unruly students(p.27).

McNeil (1988) argues that administrators should work harder to improve the quality of instruction rather than they work on techniques for increasing classroom control. In a study of four schools, McNeil found that the schools were obsessed with *behavioural problems*. Teachers were exhausted from patrolling duties that ultimately fostered student reluctance to behaviour *controls*. Teachers in these schools were rewarded more for their ability to *control* than teach students. The end result was that students became indifferent about academics. Eventually,

classrooms were filled with compliance problems and students refused to complete even small tasks, yet alone engage in critical pedagogy. McNeil argues:

> One reason discipline is such a problem in many schools is that students are bored by course content which is so divorced from their real world that it seems not worth their efforts.(p.214)

Giroux and Simon (1992) suggest that popular culture and critical pedagogy are required to prevent boredom in schools. Using popular culture, such as, magazines as a source of knowledge in the classroom, helps students authorize their voices and experiences while traditional pedagogy authorizes the voice of adults, such as, administrators and teachers.

Doyle (1993) describes teaching as one of the most demanding professional responsibilities. He argues that teaching is one of the most meaningful tasks and we can realize this when we reflect about the "intellectual, moral and material power we hold with students"(p.xv). Doyle argues that teaching is one of the most political professional jobs and he notes that we can appreciate this when we admit that teachers are one of the *cultural gatekeepers* between community, students, and school. He further states that teachers require all the conceptual devices accessible to keep these factors equalized; they need to be willing to question the existing pedagogies which lead to boredom for many students. In his own work, Doyle uses drama as a form of innovative pedagogy to enable students to utilize their minds and bodies and in an attempt to understand themselves and their relationships with others.

I have researched literature on educational change in schools in relation to behaviour programs and critical pedagogies. Now that I understand the theories on discipline, what does it mean for my everyday life as a young teacher? Like all young teachers, I am grappling with this question by trying to make sense of these theoretical entities in light of my own reality. My questions and findings challenged me to examine *discipline* in innovative ways; to explore the process of schooling in terms of the thoughts, feelings and reactions of the students as part of their educational experience; and to point to the variety of relationships to nurture between adults and children in school environments.

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